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The release of the State Health Improvement Process is an important step forward for Maryland's efforts to address unacceptable racial and ethnic and other health disparities. The SHIP identifies 24 critical measures of health disparities in our state and sets the expectation of significant and sustained progress. The SHIP is an important addition to other key activities addressing disparities in our state.

Maryland's Health Care Quality and Cost Council, led by Lt. Gov Anthony Brown, has established a new **workgroup to identify strategies to eliminate disparities in the health care system**. This workgroup is considering financial incentives and other approaches to address workforce, the quality of care, and access within health systems. It is chaired by the Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Dr. E. Albert Reece.

The Health Department's public health arm, led by Deputy Secretary Frances Phillips, is collaborating with the Quality and Cost Council's Prevention Subcommittee to identify and pursue **state policy initiatives that can impact health disparities**. Two initial areas of focus are tobacco and nutrition policy.

Now, with the launch of the SHIP, Maryland counties will have access to **start-up funding and a broad range of tools to set local priorities and mobilize communities against disparities**. I urge clinicians, business leaders, advocates, and others committed to progress to get involved in local planning efforts. Information on key contacts and meeting times will be available under the local action tab of the SHIP website, accessible through <http://www.DHMH.state.md.us>.

These latest efforts complement the Department's **seven-year initiative to eliminate minority health disparities** launched in 2004 following legislative action by the Maryland General Assembly. Our Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, led by Dr. Carlessia Hussein, has partnered with DHMH programs, local health departments, and community based organizations to implement a series of strategies to achieve health equity.

Together, we will overcome unjust and unacceptable disparities in health. Thank you for your engagement in this essential effort.

Secretary